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Taking Care of Them, Taking Care of You

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – Having to plan a funeral under today's extraordinary circumstances, with the additional stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic, places many funeral professionals in unfamiliar territory.

How directors can help navigate the ways in which COVID-19 is changing funeral rituals and how they can best help families still have a meaningful experience was the theme of an NFDA Facebook Live presentation last week titled "Taking Care of Them, Taking Care of You."

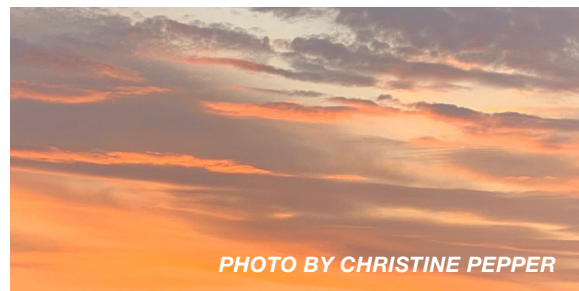


PHOTO BY CHRISTINE PEPPER

Moderated by Jessica Koth, NFDA director of public relations, the event featured Jason Troyer of Mount Hope Grief Services and Glenda Stansbury of Insight Institute, who discussed how funeral directors can take care of themselves so they can always be at their best when serving families.

In these extraordinary times, said Troyer, one of the main challenges for funeral directors is feeling stressed out, possibly even feeling somewhat inadequate because they are unable to provide funeral services like they typically would. "Funeral pro-

professionals are known for the handshake or an arm around a shoulder and welcoming people into their facility,” he said. “It has a lot of folks struggling that the service is not up to their usual standards.”

Directors also always hope that families will have lots of people coming to the services, which is also impossible at this time. “One thing I want to emphasize is that the work [done by funeral directors] remains absolutely critical whether it’s happening one on one or over the phone or through a Zoom call or Skype call or something like that,” Troyer said. “Your compassion and care are still getting through, and even if the service is one of fewer than 10 people when it would normally be more than 200, it’s still critical and valuable for the family – simply caring for deceased individuals and providing them dignity and providing families opportunities to talk about their loss.”

“You might not be able to hold the big services, but maybe you do have the ability to make regular phone calls and check in with families or write personal notes. There are still ways you can stay connected to people and show them how much you care.”

There may be other ways to provide exceptional service to your community. “Maybe you have resources you’ve been too busy to hand out that are now gathering dust in the stockroom,” said Troyer. “Maybe it’s time to go back and look at those things and provide everything you’ve got for families. You might not be able to hold the big services, but maybe you have the ability to make regular phone calls

and check in with families or write personal notes. There are still ways you can stay connected to people and show them how much you care.”

In addition to taking precautions themselves to stay safe from catching or spreading the virus, Troyer said funeral directors also must focus on watching out for colleagues. There is something to be said about some of the coping styles of the various generations, said Troyer. The general tendency for younger professionals is getting through something by being more transparent and open. “A lot of those folks have been raised in a culture of that’s how you get through things – you put it out there and be transparent,” he said. “Conversely, the older generations are getting through this by maintaining a sense of outward composure and keeping things in.”

There are advantages to both, and as a psychologist, Troyer said he is more on the share and care side. “But just realize that your colleagues may be dealing with things in very different ways. Look for ways to connect and recognize those differences.”

IN HER ROLE AS A CELEBRANT, Stansbury often talks about buckets and getting into a family’s buckets to discover their needs. “I think that particular analogy is so important right now because we have to focus on a whole bunch of things that are in families’ buckets that haven’t been there before,” she explained, such as the fear of going out and the agony of not being able to have a service or gather. Taking the usual emotions in a family’s bucket after a death and then piling on an extra layer of anxiety and some fear of the unknown heightens consumers’ vulnerability.

The second part of the bucket analogy is the funeral director’s bucket. “We all have different ways to respond to stressors and live events,” said Stansbury. “We must be cognizant of what we’re carrying around in our buckets and how we’re dealing with it.

“Some turn to Facebook and share their lives, while others maintain a stoic face and say, ‘This is my job, my calling as a funeral professional; nothing is going to shake me,’” she added. “The reality is, a lot of things have shaken us all.

“Who are your safe people,” Stansbury continued, “those who are in your bucket and who are allowed to hear you say, ‘This day sucked,’ and be okay with that? We are in such unknown territory that every day is completely different than what we expected to have on our calendars.”

Outside of social media groups, Stansbury offered, directors might want to turn attention to their competitors. “We need to start turning our competitors into our colleagues because we are in this together,” she said. “We need to figure out how to share support, share staff, whatever we need to do so we all survive this. No one is going to be better able to understand what you’re going through than the funeral director two miles away. We need to connect and build some collegiality there that may not have been there before.”

“If we can provide service now in whatever fashion we can, where we acknowledge the death and bring people together, then you can have a big service in July. But I think you have to address the grief now.”

Because Stansbury recognized that life would be very different for funeral celebrants, too, the celebrant community put out a resource book. “We’re used to sitting down in a family meeting with 10 people and gathering information for a service and then presenting it,” she said. “So we had to put together words and ceremonies and ways to connect families even if they’re watching on a screen.”

Stansbury believes that every family should be having some kind of service now. “You can wait to have a big service later, but everybody in this business knows that grief doesn’t wait,” she said.

“If we can provide service now in whatever fashion we can, where we can acknowledge the death and bring people together, then you can have a big service in July. But I think you have to address the grief now. [The] resource book gives people ideas on how we could do that now.”

Stansbury believes the current situation is an opportunity for funeral service to emerge as different, creative, unique because everything is now on the table. “In some ways, this could be energizing, but it does give us time to think about things we wanted to do in the community and be creative,” she said. “Funeral professionals are resilient people.”

However, with doing arrangement conferences virtually, it is more difficult to build trust and rapport with families. “[What] we have to learn as funeral directors normally is how to connect with families when they walk in the door,” Stansbury said, “but this requires a whole new set of muscles. Going back to what I said before, it’s truly about being in their buckets when they start.”

Stansbury suggested acknowledging what a scary time this is and assuring the family that you are going to do your very best to make sure you gather those stories and put together something that is appropriate for their loved one. “I’ve had a lot of phone interviews in my career as a celebrant; the truth is you have to work a little harder,” she said. “...It sounds really simplistic, but a lot of it is in the tone of your voice; if you have an empathetic tone, it makes a huge difference.”

Troyer added that when communicating with families, be as personal as you can and don’t shy away from asking personal things. “You’ll learn quickly if you’re talking to someone who wants to share; give them that opening and acknowledge the challenge of the situation,” he said. “You have to express the confidence that you’re going to take care of them to the best of your abilities.”

Funeral directors should assess the phone call and remember that it’s not imperative to get everything done in one call. “Be ready for two-part arrangements,” Stansbury advised, “the first to gather the

basics, and next time to ask, “Why don’t you think about some of the important stories in her life and send them to me.” If you ask cold – tell me your stories – you will not get as complete a story as when you ask them to take some time and reflect, and then get back to you. Urgency is a self-inflicted process.”

Troyer suggested taking this time to re-energize your preneed program. “This is the time to start innovating,” he said. “There are all sorts of resources out there, both within and outside of funeral service.”

This can be challenging, of course, considering funeral service is designed for personal interaction, but with new communication tools, there is a chance to tell stories and help consumers make their preneed arrangements.

Troyer suggested some old-school thinking about your next seminar so that when people are allowed to have in-person gatherings, you will have new content and a new program. You can write personal letters or notes or reaching out in other personal kinds of ways. The main element in keeping your services going is to embrace online and video chat options.

Troyer said he is seeing a huge uptick in clients using Facebook to provide funeral service-related content. “If you’re not on Facebook, you need to be to make those connections,” he urged.

This is also a very scary time financially for everyone, especially those working on 100% commission, added Stansbury. “You’re not going to have a whole lot of people looking to prefund something when they aren’t sure when their next paycheck is coming in,” she said. “So we have to change the dynamic. Can you preplan now and then come back to prefund? Those are all very difficult conversations for you as an employee and for the families with which you work.”

STRESSFUL TIMES PERSONALLY

Troyer advised listeners that burnout, fatigue and crisis stress affects everyone – funeral directors, front office staff, funeral assistants and other nonlicensed personnel without a lot of training in these areas. “The licensed staff, obviously, have the training but

have not encountered a situation like this,” he said.

The first thing owners and managers can do is simply talk about things. It may be a personal managerial style to project an image that you are in control, but it is important to reach out and let other staff members talk about how they’re doing. “It’s something that goes a long way, and you should do it daily,” said Troyer.

Ask how they feel about procedures and the new things happening at work, but also check in on any concerns they might have at home. “You don’t have to fix the problem; often it’s not a ‘fixing’ situation,” he said. “If it’s something around the workplace and there is a way to adjust procedures on the fly to take care of some of those concerns, that’s great. Those are some practical steps. The most important thing is not to ignore it and let people talk about it. They will demonstrate if they feel comfortable enough sharing.”

Another key to coping in a crisis situation is communication, both internal and external. Some firms have had pushback from families about the crowd restrictions. Troyer suggested that having your staff ready to respond to this question is important. Tell families you are monitoring the situation on a daily or hourly basis and that you are following whatever directives are in place, whether it’s a governor’s declaration or a county commission/county supervisor declaration. “As an owner, you have the federal, state and local guidelines and use those to keep staff, family and community safe,” said Troyer.

Stansbury has seen several directors who have put video on their website explaining what they are doing and why. “Explain it, because all we can do is tell the public what it is we can do,” she said.

Stansbury also believes that the perception that a funeral director is not “nice” or “accommodating” because they won’t let 50 people come to the funeral home will go away. “I would lose sleep over having a service where someone got sick,” she said.

“If you’ve never put video on your website, today is the day,” advised Stansbury. “Get the information out on Facebook and on your website about you’re doing to keep the community safe.”

Troyer agreed. “I have Facebook clients in more than 22 states, and I see that those putting out videos are getting a huge, positive reaction; they are being shared and getting lots of likes. It is an opportunity to show confidence in your voice and communicate care in that you are dealing with this situation,” he said. “While you might make a family unhappy, no one wants to have their facility tied to an outbreak.”

Funeral directors can also reach out to the community with messages to those not necessarily grieving

a death but grieving current circumstances. “The important thing is to acknowledge that this is grief. It’s a loss, and with loss comes grief,” Troyer said. “I think for a funeral home, social media is a way to address this sense of loss in a community. On a positive side, it’s also a great way to support other local businesses.”

MBJ

[Ceremonies to Celebrate Together From Afar: A Resource for Challenging Times](#) can be found on the COVID-19 hub on the [NFDA website](#).

Nurturing Hope in Difficult Times

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

“Hope is the pillar that holds up the world.”

— Pliny the Elder

FORT COLLINS, COLORADO – The caller to the Center for Loss asked a question that’s on the hearts of many right now: Are we going to get through this?

It became obvious as the conversation continued that she was experiencing feelings of grief and in search of borrowing some much needed hope. As I hung up the phone 20 minutes later, I found myself yearning to write about hope because, especially during difficult times like these, it is indeed the pillar that holds up the world.

As director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition, I advocate for our human need to acknowledge and embrace our darker emotions. Our culture usually isn’t so good at honoring loss and supporting others who are grieving, even though they are essential parts of our lives. Instead, to our detriment, we tend to focus almost exclusively on the happy and the distracting and the fun.

It’s a question of balance. We need both, you see. We need to honor the light and the dark, the happy and the sad –and everything in between – because all of it belongs. All of it is authentic. And whatever is authentic is normal and necessary.

Usually, we’re out of balance because we choose to shine our awareness only on the “good stuff.” But in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, we’re at risk for the balance tipping too far the other way, in the direction of fear and despair.

Yes, in difficult times, we must remember to hope.

Hope is the expectation of a good that is yet to be. It is an inner knowing that the future holds positive things. It is trust that no matter the current circumstances, the days to come will reveal happiness. It looks forward yet is experienced in the now.

Like mourning, nurturing hope is active – it’s something we can do. Let’s look at how we can embrace hope even as we are experiencing the many losses caused by the pandemic.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

As I write this, most of us in North America are sheltering in place. Though our normal lives have been completely disrupted and we may be experiencing very real personal losses (sick friends and family members, financial jeopardy, lost connections with loved ones), many of us are also, in this moment, safe and comfortable.

Practicing mindfulness means learning to be pres-

ent to our immediate surroundings. As I write this, the sun peeks out from billowy clouds in a denim-blue sky. I see spring crocuses blooming. My dogs sleep at my feet. Whenever I am mindful of the present moment, I find gratitude, and gratitude helps me access hope, which we might think of as gratitude for what is to come.

Being mindful in the now also helps me build relationships with the people I care about. In the now, I can share quality time with my wife, and even though I can't visit them in person, I can also spend time each day on video calls with my children and friends. The more I can use this time to strengthen relationships with dear ones, the more hope I will have for the future gatherings we will share.

RELINQUISH THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

There's a fine line between a) informing ourselves about the pandemic and steps we can take to keep ourselves and others safe, and b) overconsuming information (and misinformation) and causing undue stress and even despair.

In this information age, we have limitless content at our fingertips. We could read, watch and listen to new information about COVID-19 for many hours a day and still never be "caught up." It makes sense that we might be tempted to overconsume information in an effort to feel in control of what is happening. The trouble is, as individuals, we can't control this epidemic and we can't even fully control what happens to us or our loved ones.

Relinquishing the illusion of control can lessen our anxiety and help us to build trust in our own capacity to cope with whatever happens. If we work on mindfulness, we don't have to obsess and worry. Instead, we can learn to be okay with our lack of control and trust in our own resilience. When tomorrow comes, we will handle what comes tomorrow. Today, we are only responsible for today.

BUILD HOPE

If we believe that our futures will include moments of joy, love and meaning, we already have within us

that spark of hope. We can grow that spark into a flame by intentionally building hope into each day.

How do we build hope during difficult times?

- By taking part in activities we care about to the extent we can while sheltering in place
- By engaging in spiritual practices
- By making a collage of words or pictures that symbolize hope in our mind and heart
- By intentionally imagining the futures we desire
- By making future plans that excite us and that we know we will enjoy
- By helping others
- By staying in close contact with the people we care about, ideally through video and phone calls
- By taking care of our bodies, our minds, our hearts, our social connections and our souls.

CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSE HOPE

Please understand that hope is not something that will just passively float into your life. Instead, hope will enter when you create ways to consciously bring it into your day. Despite these challenging times, the door you open to hope each and every day will dramatically influence the quality of your life.

Consciously choosing hope means deliberately focusing on it, paying attention to it, inviting it into a given moment and letting yourself feel it as it enters. Be creative with how you give attention to hope. Moment by moment, choose hope over fear. Choose hope instead of despair. If you start feeling hopeless, act with intention to bring hope to that moment.

If hope feels out of reach right now, consider borrowing a little to get you through. When you cannot muster the energy to cultivate it yourself, it's possible to receive hope from others, and it's appropriate in times like these to turn to people who have hope to lend.

How do you know someone is filled with hope? Look for friends and family members with a hopeful outlook on life. They are people who have a posi-

tive energy when they're in your presence and make you smile when you simply hear their voice. They are usually caring, nonjudgmental listeners. The energy they radiate can anchor you. Remember, hope is a renewable resource. Borrow it now and know that in the future, when the time is right, you can pay it forward to someone else in need.

In the words of Viktor Frankl, I remind you, "Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

As you choose your own way during these challeng-

ing times, I invite you to nurture hope and be grateful for your life each and every day. **MBJ**

Alan Wolfelt, author, educator and grief counselor, serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. He has written many compassionate books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including The Mourner's Book of Hope. Visit centerforloss.com to learn more about the natural and necessary process of grief and mourning and to order any of Wolfelt's books.

NFDA, Funeral Service Foundation Announce Lead Contributions to COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – NFDA and the Funeral Service Foundation have announced their lead contributions totaling \$250,000 to the Foundation's newly announced COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund, designed to help funeral service professionals and organizations working throughout the country in areas disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

NFDA's lead gift of \$50,000 on behalf of its members and the Foundation's \$200,000 allocation will go a long way toward ensuring that funeral professionals have the resources they need to respond to the needs of families and communities.

"Funeral directors are on the front line of this pandemic, working to ensure that everyone who dies is cared for with respect and dignity," said NFDA President Bryant Hightower. "NFDA is proud to support their heroic efforts with this gift. We also recognize the significant impact that limited funerals and delayed services have on families' grief journeys and are pleased our gift will help bolster resources to help families heal during this time of uncertainty."

"The Foundation Board of Trustees launched this fund with the understanding that funeral service is already responding to the crisis in a big way and will need tremendous support to continue to do so effectively," said Foundation Chair Anthony Guerra of Guerra & Gutierrez Mortuaries in Los Angeles. "The Crisis Response Fund allocation underscores enduring commitment to all of funeral service."

ABOUT THE FUND

The COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund has two pillars of support: emergency assistance and grief support. Designed to be flexible, the fund will provide grants for immediate needs within funeral service, including emergency response to significant loss of life, organizations providing services and resources to families with unresolved and complicated grief due to loss during this crisis and other important needs that reveal themselves as funeral service continues to serve families.

The Foundation expects to announce details on how

to apply for grants from fund in the coming days.

The Foundation is counting on the funeral service community to respond generously during this time of need and uncertainty. One-time or monthly gifts at every level can be made at [FuneralServiceFounda-](#)

[tion.org](#). Checks made payable to the Funeral Service Foundation can be sent to: FSF COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund, 13625 Bishop's Dr., Brookfield, WI 53005. Or call 262-814-1549 to make your gift.

MBJ

Homesteaders Commits \$100,000 to Foundation Campaign

WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – Homesteaders Life Company has committed up to \$100,000 in matching funds to the Funeral Service Foundation's emergency assistance and grief support fund for funeral providers and families impacted by the pandemic.

Judy Ralston-Hansen, executive vice president of human resources, says Homesteaders is "all in" in support of this effort. "We are happy to provide funding to amplify the generous giving we know funeral professionals across the country will offer to this critically important campaign."

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organizations providing services and resources to families with unresolved and complicated grief due to loss during this crisis and other important needs that reveal themselves as funeral service continues to serve families.

"We're hearing firsthand about the efforts funeral directors are making to prepare and serve during this rapidly evolving crisis," said Kim Medici Shelquist, senior vice president of planning and development and Foundation Board trustee. "Homesteaders is pleased to support the Foundation while helping raise money to support funeral providers and families across the United States as they navigate this national emergency."

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NFDA Calls for Volunteers to Work in COVID-19 Hot Spots

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – NFDA is asking for volunteers who can travel to COVID-19 hot spots experiencing high death rates to lend on-the-ground assistance.

Given the likelihood that the pandemic will get worse before it gets better, NFDA is asking for members and other funeral service professionals who can assist in areas where infections and deaths are rapidly climbing. NFDA plans to maintain a list of volunteers who can mobilize quickly should it receive

federal, state and/or local requests for assistance.

Professionals willing to volunteer can click here to fill out a form ([nfda.org/covid-19/help-needed](#)) that asks potential volunteers to be as specific as possible about the kind of assistance and expertise they can offer. (Funeral service professionals who have already volunteered via the NFDA website need not provide information again.)

NFDA anticipates providing volunteers deployment

information sometime within the next few weeks, if not sooner. Specific information on locations, licensure reciprocity, expense reimbursement and travel will be provided prior to volunteer deployment.

“NFDA thanks all funeral professionals for being on the front line during this pandemic,” said CEO Christine Pepper. “Please know that NFDA stands ready to support funeral directors everywhere – NFDA member or not – so that funeral service can carry out its mission.

NFDA APPEALS TO NEW YORK GOVERNOR

NFDA has sent a letter to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo requesting that he sign an executive order granting license reciprocity for funeral directors and embalmers. A proposal was put forth to allow licensed funeral directors and embalmers in good standing in other states to be considered temporarily licensed in New York state.

The NFDA letter stated: “Medical examiners and funeral homes in NYC are overwhelmed. Families

are needlessly suffering because they can’t bury their dead. The National Funeral Directors Association and funeral service professionals around the country want to help! We have hundreds of funeral directors who have volunteered to deploy to New York City to help ensure that the dead are buried with dignity. No one wants their loved one left on a refrigerated truck waiting to be buried.

“These volunteers are experienced professionals who stand ready to help New York City in its time of need, but they need you to grant license reciprocity so they can work in your state.”

NFDA has sent names of state directors from other areas to the New York State Funeral Directors Association since they hold the proper license. Cuomo mentioned during his April 10 briefing that he will be bringing in more funeral directors. NFDA said it is ready to match many more professionals with the needs of state associations or government agencies.

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Livestreaming During the Pandemic

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – When funeral service providers found webcasting and livestreaming on their radar, a number of firms embraced the technology immediately, while some were hesitant, thinking that the distancing of families might be more impersonal; others found the concept detracting from the “drop everything and be there” mindset families have had for decades.

But with livestreaming now being a necessity, using it for today’s services may elevate webcasting to a permanent place on a funeral home’s menu of offerings. Understanding the video options available, the equipment needed and best practices for creating a quality experience for those tuning in was the focus of a recent NFDA Facebook Live webcast.

“Livestreaming Funerals During the Pandemic” featured Curtis Funk of Tukios, Chris Runnels of

Advanced Audio Systems and *FuneralVue.com*, Sidney Duckworth of Dell and Jessica Koth, NFDA director of public relations.

Livestreaming offers the consumer several options, such as Facebook Live, YouTube Live and similar consumer avenues. “What we are seeing with those, though, [is] some of the audio is getting muted and broadcasts are being shut off because of music being used, even though [the firm has] a license,” said Funk, who has more than a decade of webcasting experience. “That is one thing I would caution.”

While Tukios doesn’t offer livestreaming, it is a web-based video software used to create automated tribute videos. Before Tukios, Funk ran a company called *FuneralRecording.com*, where he did audio and video recording and livestreaming of funerals. Advanced Audio Systems acquired the webcasting

portion of the business about four years ago.

Options available to consumers might have a lower price point, but funeral directors and families might be missing the white glove approach from an industry provider. “Their approach is that you have someone to talk to if your webcast goes sideways,” Funk said. With consumer products, tech support will not be easy to come by, especially when those problems have to do with internet connectivity or hardware.

“We’re also seeing calls from funeral directors in a bit of a panic, saying they have services today that need to be online and wondering what can they do right now,” said Funk. He has also been making the recommendation to record the service with a phone or camcorder, and he can help a firm get that online.

Another concern Funk hears regards where things are heading. “Will COVID take us down the road to there being no services, which we’re already witnessing in some areas?” he asked. “We’re seeing graveside services with 10 or 12 people kind of spread out, and someone is recording using a phone.”

If an across-the-board, full-blown lockdown is put in place, Funk said the choices will be limited to platforms such as Zoom for a broadcast, another option to consider if you need to have a virtual funeral with no physical gathering. If there is a physical gathering, recording or livestreaming are obviously options, but if you can’t gather physically, how do you put together a service virtually? Maybe it is similar to a webinar.

“If you’re in a bind and have to do something today, instead of stressing yourself out, just hit record,” Funk said. “If you want to livestream, it is my recommendation that you look at the industry providers that know the space, your funeral business and how to support not just the funeral home but families.”

Runnels agreed that the biggest challenge people face is the immediacy of the need. “What is difficult is that everyone needs the same service,” he said.

“Like Curtis said, probably the best thing to do is be able to record. The tough part about that is if everything is closed, how do you get gear?”

At FuneralVue, Runnels saw the need coming and was able to order extra portable kits. Parent company Advanced Audio Systems installs cameras and sound systems and ties those pieces together to broadcast a service. But now, if there is an immediate need, Runnels has pieced together a camcorder and a microphone going to a laptop.

“Even if it’s not live, we want to be able to capture the service for the many who are not able to be there but want to share in the experience,” he said. “[Our ultimate goal] is make sure these services get captured and put on a website or in a public rink.”

Runnels warned, however, that videos put on public sites such as YouTube can be monetized by the platform. “That can be bad if you get an inappropriate commercial advertisement before your service,” he said. He also reiterated the problems with Facebook and YouTube not recognizing a firm’s music license, a frustrating development because funeral homes with licenses are legally covered to play that music.

“Some platforms don’t recognize that license because [the platforms] are not funeral specific,” he explained.

For services held at the gravesite, Runnels suggested recording the service on a phone or camcorder, from which you can get online. “We basically all have a computer in our pockets,” he said. “It’s a very different world. We just have to be creative. Don’t be afraid to call a company like us or one of the other providers and ask how to do something.”

If you’re taking a do-it-yourself approach, Duckworth suggested a laptop and recommended a Dell Vostro 15-inch with an I-7 processor and HD camera. “This is very important if you are going to be uploading things or streaming,” she said. “Lead time is approximately two weeks.

A second recommendation is the XPS 7390, a 13-

inch laptop also equipped with an HD camera; for businesses that need something quicker, it has just a week's lead time.

"You can webcast, Zoom and livestream based on the platform you will be using," she said, "and have the tools without having to buy a new camcorder since the webcam is on the laptop."

Duckworth recommended a technology refresh very soon if this is an avenue your funeral home is looking to take.

If searching for a webcam, she recommended Logitech C270 HD, with availability at the end of April.

When asked what platform might be best for families who want people to participate in a service remotely, perhaps to even deliver a eulogy or a reading or sing a song, Funk said his preference is Zoom. However, Zoom has been the victim of "Zoombombing," a practice in which hackers hijack events on the platform and intrude on a conference. (Of note, Zoom bombing has gotten the attention of the FBI, which has said that the hacking of a conference is punishable by fines and perhaps even jail time.)

Funk said users can protect themselves from Zoom bombers by having a passcode for the event and not making the link public. "In most of the [instances] I've read of someone jumping into a meeting and doing something ridiculous, the link was public," he said, adding that the event could be recorded and published later.

Zoom is very practical, especially when participants are connecting from multiple locations. "You want something that will capture the moment," Funk said, "so you want the ability to record so you have a memory for future generations."

Runnels said he's had some services that have used Skype to help people out of state or even out of the country, including one in which a participant was in Israel but wanted to give a eulogy.

Duckworth suggested that a funeral home have a dedicated laptop for webcasting. "I would think into the future; this isn't going to last forever," she said. "So make sure the laptop is able to stream; get something up to date and afterward, it can be an excellent opportunity to use it in the back office."

Even though the current pandemic has created a necessity for livestreaming, Runnels reminded viewers that there are always going to be people who want to attend services but can't. "This is more than just a temporary thing," he stated. "If you ask a family member if there is anybody they'd like to share the service with who can't be in attendance, regardless of the COVID- situation, the answer is always going to be yes. I think this time has revealed a need we've had for some time." Maybe people have been tentative about embracing this technology, but now it might become a permanent part of a funeral home's offerings.

To get a video online, said Funk, video-hosting companies are a dime a dozen. The most familiar options are Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo. "You're talking about massive files," he said, "and these systems can handle [it]."

Using an iPhone (with the setting default at 4k), the resulting file could be 8 to 10 gigabytes. "At that point, the hope is you have a decent upload connection," Funk said. "If you [do], it will take about a half hour or so.

"Our support team has been jumping on calls with funeral directors to help them to compress files," he added, "trying to shorten the upload time."

Lastly, Runnels warned people to be careful where they upload their video. "A lot of [the options] have a download capability, and some families are bothered that their video is publicly available and could be downloaded," he said. "You definitely want to know who is downloading it."

MBJ

Zoombombing and Zoom Security: Valid Concern or Too Much Hype?

By Welton Hong

LAS VEGAS – As funeral directors weather the COVID-19 crisis and ensuing restrictions from local and state authorities, those who hadn't already incorporated online videoconferencing tools have realized they must do so immediately.

In my opinion, the easiest and most user-friendly of those tools is Zoom. I was already on multiple Zoom conferences every day before the coronavirus crisis, and now that the entire team from our home office is working remotely, Zoom is absolutely essential to our business.

To help directors through this crisis, I've been recommending Zoom not only to our own clients but everyone in the deathcare industry.

Of course, it would be foolish to ignore all the headlines over the past week about security and privacy concerns with Zoom.

Whether you're livestreaming a celebration of life, consulting with a family regarding an immediate need or hosting a seminar on preneed, you certainly need to trust the security of your videoconferencing platform.

I know quite well that every business should take digital security seriously. I have extensive experience with such matters, having worked for several large tech firms in Silicon Valley before I founded my digital marketing company.

Having researched all the issues, I remain confident that Zoom is safe for funeral directors to use as long as they take a few simple steps to ensure the security of their meetings. (For the record, I want to be clear that my company has no promotional relationship with Zoom; I'm advocating it purely because it's the simplest, most convenient tool for funeral professionals to use right now.)

I'll get back to those security steps momentarily, but first, let's look at the reasons for the Zoom backlash.

ZOOMBOMBING

The term is derived, of course, from "photobombing" and "videobombing," which are the (usually) innocent pranks in which someone unrelated to the subjects pops into the background of a picture being taken or video being shot. Such practices can be amusing at times and annoying at others, but most often, it's a "no harm, no foul" situation.

That hasn't been the case with the trolls Zoombombing meetings. I don't want to minimize the seriousness of these "pranks." They're extremely ugly. Some trolls have invaded meetings to share screenshots of hardcore pornography. There have been reports of racist language and Nazi symbols being shared, in addition to other highly inappropriate material.

In fairness to Zoom, it hasn't been the only videoconferencing platform dealing with such issues. One such incident occurred during a Google Hangouts Meet chat for middle schoolers in Illinois.

Some media referred to that as a "Zoombombing" incident, despite Zoom having no involvement. That's the clear downside of having your platform's name morph into a catchy one-size-fits-all term. The fallout was immediate: As of April 8, numerous school districts across America banned teachers from using Zoom, at least temporarily. Others were still considering a mandate.

In response, Zoom put out a statement noting that it was "in continued dialogue" with school districts to continue using the tool, noting that "Zoom is committed to providing educators with the tools and resources they need on a safe and secure platform."

Similarly, a number of public and private businesses

indicated they were either ceasing or at least pausing their use of Zoom due to these issues.

ZOOM'S RESPONSE

One of the reasons I remain enthusiastic about the safe use of Zoom is the way company founder and CEO Eric Yuan responded to the issues. He didn't deflect responsibility. He fully owned it.

"I really messed up as CEO, and we need to win [users'] trust back," he told *The Wall Street Journal*. "This kind of thing shouldn't have happened."

Yuan acknowledged that his company should have done more to shore up holes in the security that hackers could exploit. In one of several blog posts on Zoom's site following the outcry, he noted that "we recognize that we have fallen short of the community's – and our own – privacy and security expectations."

Since then, the company has been working rapidly to fix security issues. On April 8, Yuan hosted the first in a series of "Wednesday Webinars" to answer questions and address new security initiatives, including a 90-day pause on feature updates to focus fully on privacy and security.

It's also fair to note that while Yuan has freely admitted that Zoom should have been better prepared, it could not have foreseen the massive increase in Zoom videoconferencing that occurred in March.

Zoom already had plenty of users, but once the coronavirus hit, everything changed very rapidly. The company didn't typically disclose specific numbers on usage before COVID-19, but industry analysts estimated it had about 13 million daily meeting participants (both free and paid) in February.

In an April 1 blog post, Yuan announced that in March, the number had skyrocketed to more than 200 million – more than 15 times the previous usage level. He also disclosed that Zoom had about 10 million daily participants at the end of 2019, so overall, usage multiplied by a factor of 20 over just three months.

Of course, that doesn't entirely excuse the security and privacy holes, as Yuan readily admitted. But it's also fair to wonder whether any business could handle 2,000% growth in a few months without facing major issues.

HOW TO USE ZOOM SAFELY

How do you feel safe using Zoom? Ultimately, it's not hard at all to protect your meetings from trolls.

Most of the hackers used automated tools to rapidly guess Zoom meeting IDs and find ones that were not protected with passwords. One of Zoom's mistakes was not turning on password protection by default for all meeting types. The company has since fixed that issue.

Another update ensures that meeting hosts can make participants wait in a virtual meeting room before accessing the discussion. The meeting host can choose to let people in individually or all at once. This allows the host to scrutinize prospective participants and ensure that they're all actually supposed to be there.

To be safe, always ensure that you have password protection enabled by default for all meetings. Furthermore, be careful not to share meeting IDs with anyone but the invited participants. Don't even share general details about meetings on public forums.

If you're hosting a meeting that's open to a group of people you don't already know (e.g., a virtual pre-need seminar), make sure you're carefully targeting your audience and conducting due diligence.

In reality, there aren't many Zoombombing trolls out there. Tens of thousands of Zoom meetings are going on right now without a hitch. But it's the relatively small number of incidents that has made a lot of noise due to the hackers employing such inappropriate content, particularly in otherwise benign environments.

With that said, I completely understand the trepidation some directors might feel given the fear-in-

ducing headlines about Zoom. When you hear about trolls invading meetings with pornography and other sorts of inappropriate content, it's perfectly reasonable to be concerned.

But Zoom leadership has been highly responsive to this crisis, moving rapidly to firm up security and protect users against these crass, juvenile hackers. As long as you're diligent about protecting your meetings with a password and only sharing meeting IDs with invited participants, you shouldn't have any problems.

One of my favorite aphorisms, coined more than 500 years ago, is, "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater." It simply doesn't make sense to discard Zoom just because a few hackers exploited certain security flaws, which have since been remedied.

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Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing (funeralhomeprofits.com) and an expert in case generation from online to phone line. He is also author of Making Your Phone Ring With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes (2019).

CDC Stands By Embalming Recommendation

Editor's note: Your local and/or state public health officials may be making recommendations that are more stringent than what the CDC has recommended. In these cases, you should defer to your state and/or local public health officials. The CDC guidance represents the minimum precautions a funeral professional should take while caring for the body of someone who died of confirmed or suspected COVID-19. You should use your best professional judgment to determine whether you should take additional precautions beyond what is recommended by the CDC.

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – On April 1, NFDA shared information regarding alternate guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO) on embalming individuals who died of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 and immediately reached out to the CDC to clarify which guidance funeral professionals in the United States should follow. Today, NFDA learned that the CDC stands by its recommendation that pandemic victims can be safely embalmed as long as the funeral professional follows proper safety protocols.

In its response to NFDA, the CDC noted that WHO is a global health organization and issues broad guidance for countries ranging from undeveloped or underdeveloped to advanced/developed. This means the guidance WHO issues can be conservative to help protect individuals in countries where

safety standards, protocols and training may not be as comprehensive as in the United States.

The CDC also noted that U.S. funeral directors have the appropriate training, credentials and experience to safely embalm decedents with viral blood-borne pathogens, such as COVID-19, by using currently accepted standards of care and the standard operating procedures consistent with OSHA regulations.

Implementing these standard operating procedures and general industry practices and standards of care should minimize hazards inherent in embalming and protect funeral home workers.

In affirming the safety of embalming victims of confirmed or suspected COVID-19, the CDC noted: Proper PPE should be used (e.g., disposable gown, face shield/goggles and face mask). If aerosols are likely to be generated, respiratory protection should be worn (e.g., NIOSH-approved N-95 respirator or higher level of protection).

The CDC indicated that one control option might be to embalm without aspiration to minimize production of aerosols.

While guidance for autopsies recommends negative-pressure isolation rooms as a first choice, most funeral homes do not have those types of rooms. In

the absence of isolation rooms, when aerosols may be generated, the CDC offers other recommendations, such as keeping the prep room door closed.

It is important to sanitize the prep room with products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims expected to be effective against COVID-19. Sanitizing the prep room, along with proper removal and disposal of PPE and good hand hygiene should help prevent cross-contamination.

Funeral home owners/managers should know the importance of OSHA requirements to conduct haz-

ard assessments and risk determinations to prevent workers' exposure to health and safety risks. If risks cannot be controlled using the hierarchy-of-controls approach, then the procedure(s) should not be conducted since the risks may not be properly managed.

Another administrative control that should be considered is whether funeral directors over age 65 or with pre-existing medical conditions should embalm confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases.

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Foundation Partners Mobilizes Supplies, Equipment, Personnel to Prepare for Surge in Deaths

ORLANDO, FLORIDA – While America's health-care system struggles to keep pace with the surge in COVID-19 hospital admissions, funeral service professionals have been challenged to prepare for the grim prospect of as many as 240,000 coronavirus deaths. Foundation Partners Group, operator of more than 135 funeral homes, cremation centers and cemeteries across the country, is prepared with the experience, resources and technology to safely care for grieving families during this outbreak.

"Federal and state governments have designated our businesses as 'essential critical infrastructure,' and each of our locations across 20 states remains open and ready to provide service for their community," said Robert Bukala, president and CEO of Foundation Partners Group.

"While many funeral homes struggle to find gowns, masks and other personal protective equipment, our locations have ample supplies, and a regional distribution network allows us to quickly shift materials to locations in need. In fact, in many areas, we're sharing PPE with local hospitals, emergency services, hospices, nursing homes and even other funeral homes. We're also lending refrigeration capacity to local healthcare organizations in the hardest hit areas," shared Bukala.

In a letter to Foundation Partners firms, Bukala outlined the steps the company is taking to keep employees, customers and communities safe, including:

- Online tools such as screen sharing and video chats, which allow families to make arrangements from the comfort of their homes and keep families and employees safe without sacrificing service levels
- Live webcasting from funeral homes, churches and cemeteries where attendance is limited to no more than 10 people, allowing extended families and friends to participate and pay their respects
- Increased frequency of deep cleaning and disinfecting all facilities, both back-room care centers and customer-facing areas
- Daily online meetings to review updates from the CDC, assess evolving local guidelines and share best practices and creative solutions
- Special employee surge teams ready to assist local teams with arrangements and decedent care in cities hardest hit by the virus.

Addressing emerging trends, Bukala said, "We're beginning to see an increase in the number of families that choose cremation, which has been a trend across our entire industry in recent years.

And there's definitely an uptick in families' desire for virtual arrangements. Some locations have gone 100% virtual, and we continue to meet every family's needs. Webcasting is also catching on. Our team at McDermott-Crockett Mortuary in Santa Barbara, California, recently organized a graveside service attended by just three family members, while 57 friends and family members participated via a popular web conferencing app."

Said Chad Frye, funeral director and market leader at Foundation Partners' Thompson Funeral Homes and Woodridge Memorial Park and Funeral Home

in Columbia, South Carolina: "It's hard enough to lose a loved one, but when the traditions that usually bring comfort at times like these are not available, it only compounds the grief families feel. We're focused on what we can do for families and how to best assist our local communities. We're livestreaming services and finding creative ways to bring support and comfort, such as pinning condolence notes to roses placed on empty chairs to represent those who cannot be there in person. Many families are opting for direct burial or cremation, while planning for larger memorial services at a later date."

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FuneralOne Offering Free, Reusable Face Shields

DETROIT – Trying to alleviate the shortage of personal protective equipment, funeralOne has developed and created reusable acrylic face shields, which it is making available to funeral directors free of charge.

"Once we heard funeral directors were last in line to get personal protective equipment, we retooled our new, as of yet not open, design center," said Joe Joachim, CEO and founder of funeralOne. "We have millions of dollars worth of equipment there, so we realigned our priorities the second I heard people were going without stuff. "This is crazy," said Joachim, "so let's care about the people who are caring for others."

FuneralOne sourced materials to make thousands of shields. The company designed and improved prototypes – 19 different versions in two days – and is essentially producing them in-house. "We're covering all of the costs, donating everything, and we're looking for other people to be part of it," said Joachim. "We like being team players. We'd like to rally more people together to get behind this. We are creating, sourcing, purchasing, packaging, shipping and even delivering [locally in Michigan] to funeral homes."

The design center has 15 people working, social-distancing from each other, to create a factory line. "We went from nothing to thousands very quickly."

When it comes to the mass quantity, Joachim said, the shipping logistics are a lot easier with standard sizes. Currently, funeralOne is offering a standard kit (two reusable shields) and a large kit (six reusable shields) to funeral homes.

"If a firm needs more masks, they can leave a comment and we'll make sure they are taken care of," he said. "What we are trying to do is make sure that everyone gets one first. If someone is in a situation where they need more, we have no issue making sure they get more."

To order, visit www.funeralone.com/covid/

This is just one of the ways FuneralOne has been supporting funeral service during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company is also making webcasting completely free of charge. "Anyone who needs to webcast, we are dropping that to zero dollars during this crisis. Whatever we can do to support funeral directors," said Joachim.

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From the Editor's Desk...

Adapting

The “new normal” has been used to describe the impact COVID-19 has had on daily life. And now that social distancing is the norm, one can't help but speculate what the next “new normal” will be. If you listen to social scientists, adaptability is a key component of survival, and necessity is the only guaranteed motivator. While the news has been full of stories of hardship caused by the virus, there have been a few with a more positive slant – speaking to resilience and innovation about the ways in which people have adjusted. Funeral directors have had to deal with mandate after mandate – first, services of 50 or fewer, then 25 or fewer; for many now, the mandate is 10 people or fewer or no service at all.

Mark Justen, fourth generation to run Justen Funeral Homes, died March 29. A community icon in McHenry, Illinois, Justen volunteered to serve in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. There is no doubt that his sudden death in normal times would have attracted hundreds to the funeral home, but circumstances dictated something quite different. Read his obituary: “Due to social distancing requirements in place with the COVID-19 pandemic, a drive-through viewing for the McHenry community to pay their final respects will be held at Justen Funeral Home & Crematory on Monday, April 6, 2020, from 12-6 p.m. All... are asked to remain in their cars at all times while in line and follow signage in the parking lot.”

As motorists approached the funeral home's porte-cochere, Justen's open casket was visible through the open front doors of the funeral home.

As we discuss the options available for serving under today's circumstances, streaming has seen a surge in popularity. In Denver, Horan & McConaty performed a service that captured the attention of national media. Arthur Bangle, 96, a World War II veteran, died in October 2019. His wife of 77 years, Olive, died in February. The family made the decision to hold off on Arthur's funeral until Olive died to do their funerals together. Arthur chose cremation while Olive requested a traditional burial. With family scattered across the country and the COVID-19 virus threatening, the traditional service couldn't take place.

The family told Horan & McConaty to move forward with the burial, and [the funeral home videotaped the private service for the family](#). In the video, two funeral directors wearing white gloves stood at each end of a flag-draped casket with their hands on their hearts as a recording of *Taps* played. They removed the flag and folded it. One of the funeral directors knelt by the front pew as if to hand the flag to a family member.

Arthur and Olive's daughter told Denver's 9News, “It was what it needed to be. It was closure.”

Despite social distancing and sheltering in place, we are at work and doing our best to live up to our mission of providing unsurpassed compassion and professionalism during some of life's most difficult times,” said John Horan. “This video is a reminder that even when public gatherings aren't possible and travel is discouraged or impossible, there are still ways to creatively honor and pay tribute to the lives of people who have passed away.”

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